

Drown

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Drown

****A/N:** This is different for me, so please let me know what you think (here or twitter: bonosaurus). It's super long, but I couldn't find a natural point to split it up that I liked, so there ya go. I can't take credit for the characters, but I completely own up to any mistakes. ******

"_You hold me without touch, keep me without chains." â€" Sara Bareilles, 'Gravity'_

She sits on the edge of the couch cushion, elbows resting on the tops of her knees, her chin resting on the bridge created by her joined hands. The apartment is quiet; TV is off. Noah is asleep, his peaceful, slumbering body visible on the iPad that sits on the coffee table in front of her. Her gaze darts between the monitor and the bottle of wine next to it.

It is unopened.

It is taunting her.

Her cell phone buzzes and without looking, she knows what it is: Ed's responding message to her plea for him to come over. Despite the late hour, she knows he is on his way. She knows why.

She watched a child die today.

A little girl was murdered in front of her, and she was powerless to stop it. She watched the light leave her eyes, and every fiber of her being wants to reach for that bottle of wine right now. Tear out the cork; bring the whole bottle to her lips.

Fuck using a glass.

She can almost taste the sweet relief that she knows lay just beneath the cork, wants so desperately to numb the pain.

It scares her how much she needs to open that bottle; that she needs to open it at all.

With all of her childhood scars, how had she still managed to become her mother?

But she made a promise to him.

So, she waits.

###

It was the night they celebrated her return to SVU, his return to IAB. She downed the last of her wine, not noticing that he had barely sipped enough to wet his lips. She gestured to the bartender.

One more.

She took note of his obvious discomfort as her second glass was poured, his unwillingness to meet her eyes.

He had tried to voice his concern; tried to put into words the things he didn't want to say. But she interjected.

I get it. You're just looking out for me.

She wasn't ready to hear his words as much as he clearly wasn't ready to say them; he was unsure of boundaries, of whether it was his place to be concerned about the drinking he had noticed recently.

She deflected his concern. It was what she did.

Olivia Benson, Queen of Avoidance.

Until they left the bar, she tried desperately to hide how much she wanted to reach for that glass.

He tried, just as desperately, to ignore the twitch he could see in her fingers.

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They had gone back to her apartment, walking quietly, each lost in their own thoughts. Despite the awkward turn the night had taken, he had become resolute in his desire to confront this issue.

He had seen the volume of her consumption increasing during the trafficking case and understood it to be a coping mechanism, an outlet for the stress of losing her command, of their relationship being outed even if only to 1-P.P. But as they walked side-by-side, hand-in-hand from the bar he thought about all the times they'd met up at bars and had a few drinks, sometimes going back to one of their apartments for a nightcap after that. It pained him to wonder if she ever had a glass or two even before their outings, how long this had

been going on.

If it got out of hand, it could destroy everything she'd built for herself: her career, her family. But it wasn't as if he didn't trust her to drink socially. To his knowledge, she'd never been "blackout" drunk. He assumed she drank to take the edge off, and perhaps over time, the amount of alcohol it took to achieve that had increased. It was a slippery slope from that point. He was worried.

She had gone into the kitchen, and he followed, staying on the other side of the counter. She could feel him watching her, but she refused to meet his eyes.

When he spoke, his voice was pleading. "Livâ€¦"

Resignedly, she replied. "Yeah?"

"We have to talk about this."

She took a deep breath, brought a bottle of water from the kitchen and sat down on the couch, her fingers busying themselves by peeling the label off the bottle. "I know."

He joined her on the couch. "What is going on?"

"I'm not an alcoholic." Her voice was firm, and he wasn't sure if she was saying it for his benefit or her own. "I justâ€¦" She met his eyes, and he softened when he saw the tears threatening to spill over her lashes. "I just need help sometimes."

Ed was silent, watching her. "It started after Lewis. I just- I just needed help getting to sleep." She stood, pacing. "I can't tell you how many nights I woke up in a cold sweat from nightmares, and I couldn't get back to sleep. I kept seeing him." She shook her head. "And every time I thought things had settled, that I could wean myself off, cut backâ€¦. Something else happened."

Just when she feels like she's finally mastered treading water, in comes a tidal wave and she's pulled under again. Lewis. Utley. Even cases and ghosts from her past worm their way into her psyche and throw her off balance._

Her voice cracked and Ed was off the couch, embracing her. She rested her chin on his shoulder taking in a deep, shuddering breath.

Ed held her, rubbing her back until he pulled away, guiding her back to the couch. He pushed a stray hair out of her face, he murmured, "Oliviaâ€¦ there is no question that you have been through more in your lifetime than any one person should ever have to." He wiped a stray tear from her cheek. "But you know this is not healthy." She nodded solemnly.

"I know." Then, seriously, "Ed, you have to know I never meant to let things get like this." She paused. "You know what growing up was like for meâ€¦with my mother." He took her hand and squeezed it in silent acknowledgement. Yes, he did know. "I swore to myself I was going to give Noah everything I didn't have. I wasn't going to be anything like her." Her voice broke, and she fought to control a sob. "And now look at me. I can't do this to him," she breathed.

He took her face in both of his hands and looked her dead in the eyes. "I want you to make me a promise. Make yourself a promise." He searched her eyes for understanding, and at her nod, he continued. "When you feel like you want to drink, when you need to escape your own head, you call me."

At her silence, he spoke again, emphatically. "I mean it, Olivia. When you want to dive headfirst into a bottle, you call me. I don't care what time it is, I will come to you. I will help you forget."

And then, Olivia nodded meekly. "Okay." She put her hands over his as they framed her face. "Okay, I promise."

###

Ed had heard about the case. Details that gruesome make it through the grapevine no matter what unit or precinct you're in. When he heard, he'd sent her a text.

You okay? I'm here if you needâ€¦ _

An hour later, he had received a reply. One word. Later.

And so he waited. He had wanted to be there when she got home, but this was something she had to initiate. She had to want to change her pattern â€" he couldn't do it for her, and he couldn't force her. It had to be her decision. Even if she wasn't the most stubborn woman on the planet, this is how it was with addicts.

Addicts. Christ, he had never wanted to think of her that way. She wasn't one. Was she?

As soon as he received her message that night, he was out the door. He imagined that she had waited until Noah was asleep before reaching out.

When he walked into her apartment, the only light on was a small lamp on her countertop. It provided just enough light for him to see the bottle of wine on her coffee table, and he immediately tensed.

Shit.

He walked closer and felt himself release a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding when further inspection revealed that she hadn't opened the bottle.

Relief flooded him.

She hadn't opened the bottle. _

He set his wallet, phone and keys on the end table next to her couch and walked further into her apartment, reaching the hallway. A left turn would take him to her bedroom. A right: to Noah's. Her bedroom door was ajar and her bedside lamp on, but intuition told him that she wasn't in there, so he veered right to Noah's room.

Bingo.

She stood over Noah's bed in her pajamas, staring fondly at her son as he slept. She hadn't yet noticed that Ed was standing in the doorway. He whispered roughly, "Liv?"

She turned to face him and he could immediately see that she had been crying. She held a finger over her lips to silence him, and combed her fingers through Noah's hair once more before she led Ed from the room, closing it softly behind them.

She walked to her bedroom, Ed following closely behind her. As soon as he shut her door, barricading them in, she was on him, pulling him into a tight embrace as she sobbed into the space between his neck and shoulder. His arms immediately encircled her, pulling her to him, one hand rising up to stroke her hair as her emotions mercilessly spilled out and onto his shirt. "Are you okay?"

She couldn't speak, just shook her head in dissent as her breathing hiccupped and she fought to regain control of herself. "No," she choked out.

He moved his hands, one to each of her biceps, and pulled her away from him far enough so that he could see her face. His eyes darted between hers, taking inventory of her swollen face, covered in tears. "What can I do, Liv?"

"Just hold me, Ed." She fell into his embrace again. Against the skin of his neck, she whispered. "Please just hold me."

Ed didn't respond, simply wrapped his arms around her tighter, holding her as she'd asked him to. Her vulnerability was unsettling to him; even after the hostage situation, he'd known that she'd been rattled but her walls hadn't come down like this. She was perpetually "fine" and "seeing her shrink". But their relationship had been new still at that point, and he wasn't sure whether her demeanor now was indicative of a deeper trust in him, or the gravity of the case that she'd just been through. He wasn't sure he wanted to know.

They stood like this, his chin resting on the top of her head, as her breathing evened out. Moments later, he felt her lips touch his neck. When she spoke, her words were soft and even with their close proximity, he had to strain to hear her. "I just need to feel something, Ed." She sighed heavily, "Every time I close my eyes I see her face." Her voice broke; she took a deep breath. "I can't â€" I justâ€" Please help me forget." Her lips latched onto his neck, and she bit him before soothing the area with her tongue.

And then he felt her hand on his cheek, turning him toward her, her mouth covering his as soon as he was within her reach. He took a deep breath through his nose as her lips coaxed his open, her tongue desperate in its exploration of his mouth, as if the last hope for her survival lay within. When he started reciprocating, allowing his lips to move over hers, she released a deep moan into his mouth.

She brought both hands down to the waistband of his jeans, hooking her fingers into his belt-loops as she started walking them backward toward her bed, lips still locked with his. Ed broke the kiss, panting, his hands falling to her hips. "Your pace, Olivia." He rested his forehead against hers. "Just tell me what you need."

Olivia tilted her head up to press a chaste kiss to his lips, bringing her right hand to cup his jaw, holding him to her. Against his lips, she murmured, "Make me feel."

He regarded her quietly. _Make me feel._ That could mean one of only about a hundred different things.

So he kissed her again. Long. Slow. Deep. He held her so close that there was not space for a tiny molecule of air between them. He divested her of the fitted tank top that she wore, knelt before her to remove her cotton pajama pants, planting kisses up her legs as he stood before her again. Grasping her hips with both hands, he pushed her lightly toward the bed. She sat down on the edge, clad only in her bra and underwear now, and used her arms to propel herself backward, propping up on her elbows and watching him as he stepped back from the bed to undress himself.

His movements were slow, deliberate, and his eyes never left hers while he pulled the sweatshirt over his head before unbuttoning, then unzipping his jeans, pushing the material down his legs. He stepped out of them, walking toward the bed before crawling over her.

Her hands immediately went up to his sides, fingers splaying over his ribs as he settled between her legs. She found herself comforted by the steady thrum of his heart that she could feel beneath her fingertips.

Alive.

He braced himself over her, his hands on either side of her shoulders.

His eyes perused her face. "Okay?" His voice was tender, more so than she had ever heard before, and it ignited a need within her that was so strong, it took her by surprise.

She nodded wordlessly, tears building up again in her eyes. She slid her hands from his ribcage down the chiseled planes of his stomach and ran her fingers along the waistband of his boxers. Her eyes darted down to his lips and he leaned down to kiss her fervently, devouring her.

He started a slow, impossibly delicate journey over every inch of her, using his hands, lips and tongue to push the buttons he knew she liked to be pushed. She was writhing beneath him before long, and once he rid them both of the last vestiges of their clothing, he buried himself inside her, stifling her cry with his mouth.

He was unhurried but forceful in his ministrations, each stroke hitting her deeply, penetrating her soul in tandem with her body. If he had his way, he'd make it just about her, would make her come using his mouth or his fingers, but he knew she needed this. She needed to be filled with something other than heartache tonight.

It was visceral, and the normal choruses of her impassioned cries were replaced tonight with soft moans and heavy breaths interspersing with his grunts of exertion and the sound of their skin colliding with every thrust of his body into hers.

When she came, she threw her head back; her mouth stuck open in a

silent scream as her body shuddered beneath him. The force of her orgasm and the tightening of her inner walls around him prompted his own release, and he showered her face with gentle kisses before he slid off of her, landing on his back to her left. He could feel her shaking; silently crying, and he immediately pulled her into his body. With her head resting against his chest, he could feel her tears land on his skin and he stroked her hair while they both came down from their releases.

When her breathing evened out he lifted her chin, forcing her to meet his eyes. "Tell me."

###

It had been Dominic that called her, his voice frantic on the other end of the phone.

_It's Marty. Sh-she has a knife. She's trying to take Alyssa.

—

She'd been out of her chair and heading out of the precinct in seconds, gesturing for her detectives to follow. Between calming words to Dominic, trying to ease his worry, she covered the mouthpiece of her cell phone, told Rollins to call ESU and the hostage negotiators.

She strapped her Kevlar on outside of the building, nodded silently in agreement with the plan to the first-responders. She had a history with the family; she would lead them in and try to lower the temperature of the situation before ESU would take over.

Outside the apartment door, she tried the handle and, finding it unlocked, pushed open the door and walked in, Fin and Rollins trailing behind her. Guns raised, they swept the front rooms of the apartment before they heard Alyssa's anxious pleas coming from the back bedroom.

Mommy, please!

Olivia had called out, gently, mollifying. "Marty?" No response. "Marty, it's Lieutenant Olivia Benson. Can you tell me what's going on in there?"

"Go away!" Marty's voice was severe.

"I can't do that, Marty." Olivia took a couple more cautious steps toward the bedroom door at the end of the hallway. Gun trained at the open doorway, she could see Dominic's frightful eyes through the crack. She held a finger to her lips in silent instruction. "Marty, can you tell me if everyone is okay? Is anyone hurt?"

The responding voice was less confident. "Everyone's fine."

Olivia was at the doorway now. She quickly peeked through the crack, trying to ascertain a visual into the room. She could see Dominic still, but Marty and Alyssa must have been somewhere on the other side of the door.

Communicating her intent silently with Fin and Rollins, she lifted the barrel of the gun upward in a non-threatening gesture, easing her

arms through the open doorway slowly. She did not want to escalate the situation unnecessarily and cause Marty to make any rash decisions.

"Marty, I'm going to come in now." Heart pounding, she lowered the gun to the floor. "Just me, alright? I'm not armed. I just want to talk about this. I want to make sure everyone gets out of here safe, okay?"

"NO!" Olivia stiffened when she heard movement, heard Alyssa shriek, but breathed a sigh of relief when it didn't sound pained â€" just surprised. "No, don't come in here."

"I just want to talk, Marty. This doesn't have to happen this way. Can you let me come in and talk to you?"

Silence.

"I'm going to come in now, Marty, okay?"

Defeated, Marty murmured a response. "Okay."

Olivia slowly pushed open the door and entered the room.

Walking in, she saw Dominic to her left. He breathed an obvious sigh of relief that she had made it this far. She tried to send a reassuring glance in his direction; she would do everything she could to resolve this as peacefully as possible. She stepped further into the room, hearing the distant footsteps of the ESU team and the rest of her squad trekking as silently as possible into the apartment, ready to intervene in case the situation went awry.

"How are you doing, Marty? Can I get you anything?"

"I just want my daughter."

"I understand that. I do. And we can work on that, but I need you to put the knife down first, okay?" She had her arms out in front of her, gesturing down the floor, willing Marty to submit to her request. "How about we let Alyssa go, and we can all work this out?"

"No!" Marty viciously exclaimed. She waved toward Dominic with her knife-wielding hand. "He wants me committed." Crying, "He wants to take my daughter away from me!"

Marty jerked her hand and Alyssa yelped, her eyes fearful. "Mommy! Please!"

Olivia tried to muster the most comforting look she could for the poor, terrified girl before her. "It's okay, sweetie. It's gonna be okay."

"She is my daughter and he wants to take her away from me!"

Pointing behind her toward Dominic, Olivia addressed Marty again. "He doesn't have that power, Marty. There's a process to that. You don't have to lose your daughter. You can get help. I can get you help." She clasped her hands together and looked at Marty pleadingly. "Let's

just put the knife down, okay?" She took a deep breath. "Alyssa is scared, honey. Can you put the knife down and we can talk about this some more?"

Marty simply looked at Olivia, her eyes darting all over the place. She was sweating, her grip never wavering on the knife to her daughter's throat. "I can help you, but you need to put the knife down first."

"She's crazy! She's never going to let her go!" Dominic was shaking with fury. Looking at Marty, he growled. "This is why I wanted to take her away from you."

Olivia closed her eyes, trying to hide the overwhelming feeling of defeat in her demeanor. He wasn't helping, and if he didn't shut up, this was not going to end well.

She had hoped she'd be able to talk Marty down, but it didn't appear that the woman was going to give in. Olivia looked to her right, through the open doorway and caught Rollins' eye, nodding imperceptibly to give a silent signal that it was time for ESU to move in and take over.

"My friends are going to come in and take Dominic out of here, then it's just going to be us girls." She nodded at Marty, who dipped her head in acknowledgement. "Just us girls. And then we can work this out."

Two uniforms came in and put an arm under each of Dominic's armpits, escorting him from the room. Olivia saw the next round of ESU officers waiting to make their entrance, diffuse the situation.

They were only a few steps away from the doorway when she saw Marty's demeanor shift. Her eyes went cold. "You just want to take her from me. Don't think I don't understand what you're doing! You're going to help them take her away." Marty was crying now. "If I can't have her, no one can!" And she dragged the blade of the knife across Alyssa's throat.

"NO!" Olivia screamed. The room flooded with NYPD and Marty dropped the knife, her arms violently pulled behind her back and handcuffs slapped to her wrists by ESU. Olivia stood shell-shocked as she watched the blood flow from the slit in the young girl's throat, the light dimming behind her eyes. She only faintly heard the cries of Alyssa's father as he came flying into the room, crouching before the now lifeless body of his daughter.

Olivia struggled for breath, hyperventilating as she staggered back to the far wall of the bedroom. Tears were obstructing her vision, distorting the blood on the floor across the room so that it was the only thing she could see. _They had been so close. Just a few more seconds, and Alyssa would have been fine._

She was only dimly aware of Fin's arms circling around her shoulders, attempting to steer her from the room. She could hear his faint words of comfort, but they sounded so far away, drowned out by the deafening sound of her heartbreak.

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Her eyes immediately filled with more tears, and she ducked her head, trying to compose herself. She pulled away, leaning back against her pillows and watched as he shifted onto his side to face her, his elbow bent, right hand cradling his head as he looked at her.

"There was so much blood." She shook her head, as if trying to get the image out of her head. "So much blood."

Ed scooted over, closing the distance between them, and pulled her into his embrace once again. His voice was like sandpaper even beyond it's usual rasp from trying to keep his own emotions in check. "I'm sorry, Liv. I know you did everything you could for her."

"I wasn't fast enough." Her body shook with the force of her sobs, and he let her cry against him, running his hand along her back while whispering soothing words to her.

It's not your fault. You're okay. I'm here.

â€|

"I came home, and I wouldn't let Noah out of my sight." They were still in her bed, blankets pulled up around them. Tear-tracks remained on Olivia's face, but she was no longer crying. Spent; exhausted under the weight of the day.

"That's understandable."

She scoffed, a humorless laugh. "He was probably so confused. _Why won't Mommy let me down?_ I carried him everywhere." Solemnly, she added. "I just needed to hold him."

"Did it help?"

"A little," she acquiesced.

They allowed themselves to sit in silence. Truthfully, this case brought back a lot of painful memories. Gitano comes to mind. That case had nearly destroyed her for an entirely different reason, but the similarities between them â€" the goreâ€| she has to consciously force the bile from rising up in her throat. It's been a long time since a case has rattled her this much, gotten this far under her skin. Now, it's not just the cold-heartedness that gets to her. As a mother, this case strikes a different chord in her now, cuts into a different nerve.

How do you destroy your own flesh and blood? It's something she wouldn't have been able to compute back in the Gitano days despite how often Elliot threw at her that she couldn't understand without having children herself. But the road she's been on that led to Noah â€" she can't imagine ever causing him pain. It's why, somewhere deep in her mind, she knows she has to get control of her problem. The one she doesn't want to believe she has.

She scrubbed a hand down her face in exasperation. "I just don't understand how a mother could do that to her child. How do you bring someone into this world, and then tear them out of it that way? What's the point?"

"Sometimes there isn't one. Some people are just twisted, Liv. You

know that better than anyone, seeing what you see everyday."

Looking down, she murmured, "I wanted to drink."

Ed tensed a bit; this was still difficult territory for them to navigate. "I know. I saw the wine on the table. I'm glad you texted."

"I don't know how to keep doing this, Ed." She sounded beaten, broken. "I'm so damn tired. And it doesn't even matter. There's always another case, another parent abusing their child, another rapist."

"Hey." He lifted her chin, and her watery eyes met his. "You are making a difference, every day." She scoffed at him, disbelieving. "I mean it, Olivia. This is a shit job a lot of the time, and sometimes people can't be helped. But you gave that girl something today."

"A death sentence?" She interjected painfully.

"No." He took hold of one of her hands in his. "That little girl died knowing she had someone in her corner. You gave her hope."

She was quiet for a while. Thoughtful. Alyssa reminded her so much of her, caught between a rock and a hard place, dealing with a mother who couldn't reconcile her own feelings, didn't know how to love her properly.

Ed spoke up again, his voice soft. "Liv, I know you saw a lot of yourself in that girl." She nodded silently, taking in a shaky breath. "We all have demons. But you can't drown them and expect them to go away." She looked up at him, looked him square in the eyes as he fought through his own emotion. "I don't want to watch you self-destruct."

Her eyes closed against the onslaught of tears that were cascading down her face at his words. She didn't want to self-destruct, had never intended for one glass of wine at night to turn into two and three before she was finishing a bottle just to sleep on the hard days. But it was like she couldn't catch a break. William Lewis had been the crack that shattered everything until there was a chasm in her soul that she couldn't fill. Therapy would get her close, but then there would be something else — another case, and she could feel pieces of her being carved out again and again and again.

Survive one crisis and it was just onto the next. She was beat. So tired. Tired of the evil in the world, tired of not being able to win against it. It was always there.

And then there was Noah. He was her first light in the darkness and probably the only reason why her spiral downward hadn't been steeper, more out-of-control. He filled in a lot of her cracks. It was all but impossible to see the horrible things in the world that she had and just be able to shed it like a winter coat when she got home in the afternoon, but he had given her a reason to try not to bring that evil home with her. And she'd fallen down into the bottle instead.

But Ed — He was doing his part to fill in the cracks within her that

Noah couldn't. He was becoming a safe haven for her, a stable force behind her that she could lean on when she needed to, even if unconsciously. He had been proving himself to her since their relationship started its evolution, and now he was offering himself up to her as an outlet so she didn't feel the need to drown her struggles.

###

Despite falling asleep late wrapped in Tucker's arms after what had been one of the most physically and emotionally exhausting days of her life, Olivia awakens early the next morning.

She slips on her panties and tank top, planting a kiss on Ed's forehead before quietly leaving the room, shutting the door behind her. She checks on Noah, still fast asleep in his bed, before making her way out into the rest of the apartment.

She sees Alyssa everywhere.

Walking into the kitchen, she fills her kettle with water and sets it on the stove, turning the heat up. As she waits for the water to boil, she sits on the armrest of the couch, gazing out the windows as streets of Manhattan begins to wake up. Street vendors setting up shop, early-morning commuters making their way into subway stations and cabs.

She hears the faint beginnings of a whistle from the kettle and moves quickly to take it off the heat before it wakes the boys. Sullenly, her mind weighed down by the heavy thoughts in her head, she bobs the teabag up and down in the water while it steeps. Rhythmic. Permeating.

Mug of tea in hand, she returns to her perch on the armrest, watching the sun in its ascent. A new day: one that Alyssa will never see. She loses herself in trying to imagine the woman that Alyssa might've been someday. What she would've done with her life, all the what-ifs she thought about when a child was gone too soon.

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That was where Ed found her some time later, after waking up and feeling the cold sheets where her body had lain next to his the night before. He pulled his boxers up to his waist but stayed shirtless, padding softly out of the bedroom in search of her.

He knelt one knee on the couch cushion behind her and pressed a kiss to her left shoulder before resting his chin there and wrapping his arms around her waist protectively. "Okay?"

She leaned her head into his, covering his hands with the one of hers that wasn't holding the steaming mug of tea. "I will be." Sighing, "I'm not sure what the arrangements are for her yet, but I want to go."

She could feel him nod into her shoulder, and his words were muffled when he spoke. "Figured you would. Want me to come?"

"Please."

This was a concession. She wanted to be able to do this on her own, but she recognized that it would ease her burden if Ed were there with her. It was not lost on either of them how steadfastly the Olivia Benson of the past would have refused help, of any kind. Wryly, she remembered joking with Elliot once years ago that she'd like "I'm fine" to be the epitaph on her headstone. The emotional and psychological wounds inflicted on her by Lewis had forced her hand in that department: letting people in. She'd had to let her walls down with Lindstrom " but she couldn't do it with Brian. Not completely. With Ed, though" she felt freer, she could let him see her weak and she knew without question that there was no judgment; it didn't change who he saw when he looked at her. She was still Olivia. Badass Benson.

And her mind drifts to the reason why he's here to begin with, the promise she'd made to him. She'd been a fool to think that the wine could fill in the fractures within her after every thing her mother had been through, put her through. Her mother might still be alive - might have met her grandson - if she hadn't been an alcoholic. And here she was, trying to drown her pain away with glass after glass of cabernet.

They stayed there; she perched on the armrest, him behind her. As if knowing the thoughts that were running rampant in her mind, he murmured softly in her ear. "You're not your mother, Liv." He squeezed his arms around her. "You texted me, instead of giving in." He paused. "You're not her."

"

She doesn't know how to respond to that, so she doesn't try. "You have to get ready for work soon."

She feels him shake his head. "Taking a personal day; staying here with you."

Even if she wanted to go into work today, she's on mandatory leave after yesterday. She'll have to get cleared by Lindstrom before she can go back. She smiles, "Ed, I love you for what you're doing, but I'll be okay. You don't need to babysit me. Besides, what is your boss gonna think about you playing hooky?"

"I'm not staying to babysit you or because I think I have to. Personal time is personal time, Liv." He presses a chaste kiss to the underside of her jaw " it's the closest to her mouth he can get from his current position.

She sets her mug down on the windowsill and turns in his arms, wrapping her arms around his neck to cradle his head while she kisses him. "Thank you." She kisses him again. "For coming last night." Staring into his eyes, "For trusting me."

He nods and presses his lips to her forehead before cupping her jaw with one hand and kissing her lips.

"Always."

###

Later that day, Olivia carried the bottle of wine into the kitchen.

She took got her corkscrew from the drawer and opened the bottle of wine.

And then, she poured it down the drain.

It wasn't so much that she didn't trust herself to have it in the house anymore without overindulging.

She was treading water again. Even if another tidal wave came that threatened to pull her under. She would be okay.

Ed would make sure she didn't drown.

**A/N2: Hope you enjoyed! There's an update coming to 'You and I' sometime over the weekend (I need the lighter stuff now). **

End
file.